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First Responder Safety: Potential Violent Protest Tactics and Techniques

The purpose of this information bulletin is to assist first responders with facilitating event-related activities, protect the rights of persons lawfully assembled, and prepare for unlawful conduct. In recent years, several protests over controversial officer involved shootings have resulted in violence against first responders; have affected public safety, and caused property damage costing communities millions of dollars.

TACTICS AND OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FROM FERGUSON, MO:¹

- Antagonizing – Some protestors will look for weaknesses in law enforcement (LE) by attempting to break officers down mentally and physically. Stand your ground and do not give up. Film everything.
- Diversion – Some protestors will try and divert the attention of officers using many methods including but not limited to setting fires, chaining themselves together, screaming and yelling, throwing rocks. etc.
- Getting behind the line – By creating a diversion some protestors hope to get a few of the officers to leave the line in an attempt to penetrate the line or get behind it.
- Human Barricades – Some protestors will form human barricades by either chaining themselves together or placing PVC pipe between themselves to create a "hard" line. They use these human chains to block officer vehicles, Fire, EMS and other first responders as well as vehicular traffic.
- Outside Professionals - Many professional protestors from outside the area will come in who are experienced these events.
- Multiple Angle Infiltration - Some protestors will send several groups towards the line from different directions. This is an attempt to get the line to move in a direction that is not warranted.
- Reporting False Information – This is an attempt to direct LE resources to different areas.
- Weapons - Some protestors carried backpacks full of bricks and other hard objects to throw at LE. They also carried homemade gas masks and other devices such as Molotov cocktails.

¹ St. Louis County Sheriff's Office

- Radio Communications – Protesters were able to access communications by using readily available apps and equipment. Agencies may consider rotating frequencies to avoid intrusions.

TACTICS AND OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FROM BALTIMORE, MD:²

- Make sure to canvas locations and allies in the areas near the protests for piles of debris or construction materials that may be used to target responders. Have garbage picked up and cleared away as much as possible. Look for items like bricks and rocks, etc. that individuals may have stacked together in preparation for the protest and have those removed if possible.
- Vehicles in hot zones are a prime target. Have an idea on how to transport your personnel in and out of the area without them having to leave numerous vehicles unattended.
- Keep track of who is deployed and where. If the event is prolonged this becomes more difficult and can become a problem.
- Keep track and fully document injuries to all officers immediately. In the course of the event these can get overlooked or put aside but it is important to get these documented quickly.
- Have contracts with food and water vendors in the area and have a plan on how to transport and distribute this to personnel.
- Make sure that each group has at least one person with a functioning body camera. Make sure that warnings are recorded prior to any action taken or arrests made. This is valuable back up in the after math.
- Make sure the proper amount of riot equipment is readily available. Face shields are very beneficial, help prevent injuries and enable action when necessary. Pepper balls are a useful tool, more so than foggers as those tend to also affect responders.
- Summer allows for more participation among juvenile groups. Make sure to check with legal departments on use of force, arrest procedures, lockup locations and other issues regarding juveniles. Make sure to have arrest teams or someone designated to handle just the arrests. These can get out of hand when multiple agencies are involved over a period of time.

Extremists, anarchists, gangs and other instigators may infiltrate protests groups and activists as a means to conduct criminal activity and disrupt these events. Extreme tactics and violent actions may provoke law enforcement and will attract media attention. Some extremists are experts in technology and well organized. They may have research local laws, ordinances and property lines. They may also have “legal observers” who videotape incidents and have their attorney’s phone number written on their arm. Many of these organizations attract individuals from all over the nation to support their cause, either via social media or travel to the location.

See separate document “Protest Tactics and Techniques” for additional information. The reference number for this document is 16-4450.

² Baltimore Police Department